

# Specialist Dietitians in Oncology

**It has been estimated that one in three people will be affected by a diagnosis of cancer in their lifetime. Many people experience eating concerns either before, during and after their treatment, for example unintentional weight loss, cancer related fatigue, digestive problems and swallowing difficulties.**

The news of a cancer diagnosis is an extremely difficult time for both patients and their families and can bring about many psychological, emotional, spiritual and physical challenges for those being treated for and living with and beyond their cancer.

Oncology specialist dietitians are able to provide evidence based, expert advice on the diet needed to help optimise a patients nutritional wellbeing and quality of life. They can provide nutritional counselling to patients and their families/carers at any stage of their cancer treatment and rehabilitation.



## Oncology Specialist Dietitians:

- Can help patients who are experiencing specific dietary problems as a result of the cancer and/or its treatment e.g. loss of appetite, sore or dry mouth, taste changes, weight loss, nausea and vomiting, changes in bowel habits
- Will be able to provide patients and their families/carers with practical information on foods to choose, portion sizes and meal patterns to help support them at diagnosis, during and after treatment
- Provide fatigue saving strategies and advice regarding food shopping, cooking and recipe ideas
- Play a key role in supporting people living with and beyond cancer by assessing and managing the effects of cancer treatment and reducing the risk of malnutrition or secondary cancers (and other conditions like diabetes, cardiovascular disease etc.) through appropriate nutritional counselling and support
- Work closely with other members of the multidisciplinary team to provide effective and holistic care
- Can offer advice and support to patients, family and friends who may also want to know and understand why eating and drinking habits have changed and how to help.

As well as individual consultations with patients Oncology Specialist Dietitians will also support group activities which might include public health messages in cancer prevention groups, living well after cancer support groups, weight management and cookery groups.

Oncology Specialist Dietitians are involved with ongoing research, audits and engage in patient satisfaction work to help improve patient outcomes. Dietitians also provide comprehensive evidence based teaching for healthcare professionals working in oncology.

### What people are saying about Oncology specialist dietitians...

**"Highest praise for the Head and Neck Support Team, South Devon Healthcare team (Dietitian, Nurse and Speech and Language therapist) who delivered my treatment. With just a little grit and determination from me they saved my life. Their skill, compassion and care was nothing less than exemplarily. Indebted to them"**

Head and Neck cancer patient

**"I was able to rebuild my confidence in trying new foods after my surgery for colon cancer thanks to the support and advice I got from my Dietitian"**

Colorectal cancer patient

**"The Dietitian gave me hope in what I could eat and reassured me about what I was managing to eat during my chemotherapy"**  
Pancreatic cancer patient

**"Oncology Specialist Dietitians are an essential and integral part of the service managing gastrointestinal consequences of cancer treatment. Specialist dietary advice is needed for over one third of all patients attending the clinic. Research shows that diet can make a significant difference to symptom management for those living with and beyond cancer"**  
Royal Marsden Hospital, London

**"Oncology Specialist Dietitians play a major role in reducing obesity, which is a significant risk factor in the cause of cancer. 8.7% of breast cancer cases are attributable to being overweight and obese and this rises to 24% in oesophageal cancers. Dietitians also provide nutritional assessments in preparation for the patient under-going cancer treatments. Appropriate nutritional screening and timely intervention can also limit weight loss. This potentially has direct cost benefits both financially and in terms of the quality of life of the patient and carers. A five day reduction in length of stay, from 15 days to 10 days, as a result of minimising malnutrition provides an annual saving of £266 million".**  
MacMillan Cancer Support (1)

#### References

(1). <http://www.macmillan.org.uk/Documents/AboutUs/Research/ImpactBriefs/AlliedHealthProfessionals2015updated.pdf>

The British Dietetic Association, founded in 1936, is the professional association for dietitians in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is the nation's largest organisation of food and nutrition professionals with over 8,000 members. The BDA is also an active trade union. To find out more about other areas of work that dietitians are involved in please visit:

[www.bda.uk.com](http://www.bda.uk.com)

#### Try our:

Food Fact Sheets: these give information about foods and also about medical conditions - available on the website.

#### Why not follow the BDA:



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